

Our Time

INCORPORATING POETRY AND THE PEOPLE

July 1943

V. I. NEMIROVICH - DANCHENKO

by HERBERT MARSHALL

MONOPOLY THREAT TO FILM
WRITERS

By GEORGE H. ELVIN

AND CRITICAL ARTICLES OF TOPICAL INTEREST

VOLUME TWO

SIXPENCE

NUMBER THIRTEEN

Unity Theatre

MIDSUMMER PRESENTATION

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with

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Our Time July 1943

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Number Thirteen

THIS IS ISSUE NUMBER THIRTEEN OF what is normally a twelve-issue volume. OUR TIME is thus marking the end of its "pocket-size" era. For there will be big—and basic—changes in the August issue, Number One of Volume Three.

Our scope is to be widened, the editorship is to be changed, our pages are to be enlarged to give room for adequate presentation of all material.

Now, in issue Number One of Volume Three, we shall attempt these tasks:

—to show the fine heritage of British culture, and how it can provide the basis for a proud future;

—to show how all art and entertainment can be turned to-day into a weapon of the people in our fight against fascism;

—to urge all workers in the cultural industries—in music, cinema, stage (amateur and professional), radio, architecture, painting; all who are connected with both amateur and professional cultural organisations—to greater efforts in the parts they have to play in the

struggle;

—to bring into cultural organisations those who are not members but who are interested in the cause of British culture.

To give you an idea of the type of material we shall carry: the big-feature article for August deals with the British music-hall, its grand traditions and its future, by an enthusiast who is also an expert.

The issue will include articles on all phases of British culture, news of international artists, short stories, poems (more poems, by the way) commentary and criticism.

Perhaps just one letter of several we have received lately will explain the reason for this change in editorial policy.

It comes from a soldier, a ranker in the R.A.S.C.

He says: "I only read OUR TIME casually, as one might read the label on a sauce-bottle—when there is nothing else to read.

"It always seems to me to be too narrow for a broad circle and too broad for a narrow circle."

We don't agree entirely either with his geometry or his criticism which

is, to say the least, rather sweeping.

But it contains a meed of truth which is also brought out in other letters.

We have sinned against the many in catering for the few. We have restricted ourselves in more ways than one:

—in the purely artistic sense, because of the seemingly tacit depreciation of past culture (even thus, a reflection from our title?)

—in the attempts (perhaps few, but still too many) to compare the culture which may arise in the conditions of "progressive" capitalism—which has still contributions to make to culture so long as it remains "progressive"—with that of Socialist Russia;

—in the ignoring of some facets of British cultural life which might smack too much of commercialism, forgetting, let us say, the cultural influence, good and bad, of Hollywood and George Black, in our anxiety to impress upon readers the success of film and stage experiments by the "moderns."

Commercialism will not be changed into a people's culture by ignoring it and constantly repeating what has been done by other peoples.

It can only be changed from below, by the people, through the re-educated desires of the people.

That re-education can only be brought about by those who themselves can, and do, participate in the pleasures and pursuits of the people.

You can see that we (the new editors speaking) have taken on a big job. We want your help. Tell us what you think of it.

Amateurs

THE PHRASE "UNDERCUTTING AMATEUR" used in last month's editorial seems to have been misconstrued by some of our readers. Let us assure them that when we mean "amateur" we write "amateur," and when we

mean "under-cutting amateur" that is what we set down. We are more than a little astonished that anyone who had read the rest of the issue should have thought we could have confused the two species.

The stronger the amateur movement the stronger the position of the professional—that is the view of OUR TIME. The amateur has a very important and special role to play, he is the pioneer, he breaks new ground, experiments and by his enthusiasm ever widens the circle of public appreciation for the art he practises.

But as things are at present there is another kind of amateur, worthless to the public and a menace to the professional, who possessing an exhibitionist streak, no talent and a fat bank balance is able to bribe his way into appearing before the public.

Trade Unionism and the application of the "closed shop" principle to the professions can end that sort of thing once and for all.

From Chicago

"A BEATING HE SUFFERED AT THE hands of soldier patrons, who resented a remark he made from the floor, has resulted in George Bernard, of the Bernard Dancers, being forced to retire from the show at the local Latin Quarter.

"It all started when Bernard and his dancers were received coolly by the audience after they had followed Frances Faye, scat singer. When Bernard's turn was given the cold shoulder by the audience, he flip-pantly remarked:

"'Do I have to be Jewish to get applause?'

"There were many soldiers among the audience, and some of them waited for Bernard after the show." (*Variety*. 14.4.43.)

Just a way they have in the American Army.

Greig: Centenary Celebrations *by H. G. Sear*

THE MOTIVE OF THIS ARTICLE IS the centenary of the birth of Grieg which occurs this month. But several matters have got to be cleared up first. A great deal of ink has been spilt just lately over the question whether politics has anything to do with music; and if so, does it improve or mar music?

Well, we have got to be as clear about this as possible, because several of the orthodox, point-scoring critics are not. First because they seem to think that politics is something committed either by men in top hats and striped pants, or by men in red ties and corduroys, they are quite sure that it is nothing to do with musicians. Then because they themselves and most musicians of their acquaintance don't do those things they conclude that if they did their precious art would suffer. So they go round and round; they feel ever so rounded-off and complete. Complete isolates! And it begins to show.

Now if it happens that a more-than-ordinarily eccentric composer becomes absorbed in some movement or other, and, being a musician before anything else, finds music the most powerful medium for the expression of his feelings, these critics turn on him. Mind, all their lives they've swallowed all sorts of ideas expressed in music by all sorts of men, but as it is well known that music is *inspired* from some ethereal world not this, they haven't noticed it. And if some composer happens not to be a complete blockhead and masters a political philosophy in addition to his own craft; if he expresses it forcibly in conversation and print; if he looks for poetry or

drama that has the same aim and uses it in his art; then he is trebly suspect.

We're all a bit muddled about it, I expect. At breakfast the other morning I heard a man say, "Well, it shows that it wouldn't do to let the working class get the upper hand." I'll bet any money that that man thinks he believes in majority rule. I overheard the word democracy. And then the Queen told us the other day that we were fighting for christian ideals completely ignoring the fact that most of her subjects are Mohamedans. Which shows you.

It seems to me that politics is the very stuff of life. The struggle to find the best channel for our individual genius, the desire to hold the world up to ransom on its account, or to serve the world, what are these but politics? Whether you are composer or compositor it has to be faced. Your job, your genius, your idiocy, all have their social repercussions. That is why, in my musical explorations, I seek the connection between music and society.

That is why, in looking through a Life of Grieg, one thing particularly attracted my attention. Grieg was a Dreyfusard. It delighted me to learn that he was so disgusted by the verdict against Dreyfus that he refused to appear even at concerts devoted to his own works, in Paris. Justice was dead in France, he said. Whereupon the newspaper, *L'Intransigeant*, as active then as to-day, and on the same side, addressed an abusive letter to "M. Edvard Grieg, Jewish composer," which caused Grieg to exclaim, "Hurrah for

Mendelssohn."

You do not need to be informed that *L'Intransigeant* was not the victim of illusion in this instance. It was merely doing its dirty anti-semitic work. And it no more hesitated in lying about Grieg and The Affair, then than now. But Grieg at least did not have to eat his words as the French State did.

Of course, when a state is forced to climb down in such a case, sensible people begin to ask what exactly the state is. Most of them, left alone, would have reacted much as Grieg did. Most of them would have discovered that whatever the state was, it was not them. But this is to argue in them a degree of political consciousness which they have not yet attained. Looking round we discover that they are by no means left alone. Interested organs like *L'Intransigeant* are very much alive and active. In Grieg's case the lying organ at once spread the notion that Grieg was a Jew. They knew that the poison would be swifter than an antidote held by a lazy people who would rather read than reason.

It was Finck's Life of Grieg that I was scanning. He only quoted the Dreyfus incident to show what a nice man Grieg was. You know, animated by the loftiest ideals and all that. I quote it because I hope to show that it and his characteristic musical expression both sprang from the same source.

Towards the middle of last century there was fermenting in Norway a powerful liberal movement. At first it was as individualistic and extravagant as that which followed the French Revolution. Norway was awakening to the claims of nationalism and since the more enlightened of her people felt pride in being Norwegian they also felt it incumbent upon them to make Norway a

country to be proud of. It was a progressive movement. The better-off affected the simplicity of the peasants; fashionable literature is full of examples. But the more critical observed that the peasantry really made up the people and had in it the stuff of life.

The violinist, Ole Bull, collected the folk-tunes; the zoologist, Asbjørnsen, the tales and legends. In his stories Bjørnson portrayed the real peasant whom he knew well; in his poetical dramas, especially in *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen analysed him. Poets like Vinje, musicians like Nordraak and Grieg gave artistic expression to the deep feelings and aspirations of the time. Not always clearly, not always without contradiction, but generally with force and vigour. The vigour of the whole group seems to have derived from folk-stuff. They were the spearheads of the folk movement. However loosely they were attached to party they were integral to the national liberal movement.

So we find Grieg, trained at Leipsig in the tradition of Mendelssohn, not for a moment succumbing to the latter's enervating, conservative influence as so many of our own musicians did. Having absorbed the influences at work in his own people, he began to speak emphatically in his own tongue. His preoccupation with folk-melody was healthy; his pride in being Norwegian was healthy; because in neither instance did it end there. So far from copying the folk-melody he saw that it was simply the raw material out of which his own more highly wrought music could be fashioned. So far from being a machine-made conventional Norwegian, he saw that the true Norwegian could not afford to give his sanction to reaction or injustice.

Point-scoring critics try to make out that we "progressives" believe

that the creative artist has only to steep himself in the political activity of his day to produce greater music or greater pictures. Nothing of the sort. Without technical mastery expression is thwarted. The artist is peculiarly sensitive to the influences which surround him. If he reaches out with all his might, if he attunes himself as far as he is able, to the forward movement in which the peoples of the earth are involved, his work will gain in passion, conviction and clear expression.

Thus Grieg's action in France expressed his contempt for anti-semitism. It may have been hasty and even tactless but it sprang from the liberal sentiments then circulating at home. His "Hurrah for Mendelssohn" rings true. Nevertheless, as we have seen, he was no mere copy of the Mendelssohn cult. His background made it possible to learn Mendelssohn's craft and to turn it into a vehicle for his national consciousness. Seen this way, Grieg appears to us not man merely, not composer merely, as if they are distinct creatures, but full citizen, able and eager to give himself to his fellows. His music, an unmistakeable expression of national culture, takes its proper place in world-music, and we are the richer for it.

That is why here and now we celebrate his centenary. It would be possible to enlarge on his musicianship or originality. It would be easy to indicate that his Romanticism, a quality closely related to nationalism, is not Byronism as so much Romantic art is. It would be simple enough to define his contribution to harmony and rhythm. But it is of much greater importance to demonstrate that once a composer is master of his craft, he has nothing to lose by plunging into the stream of current affairs, by being the complete citizen.

Priestley, the theatrical Journalist

by Peter W. Proudman

DURING THE EARLY 'THIRTIES A BEST selling novel was startling the reading public. The novel itself wasn't particularly startling—its chief characters being a Yorkshire mill worker, a group of third-rate concert party entertainers and a schoolmaster—in fact, very ordinary people—but it was because this book was about ordinary people that it caused such a stir. The fiction of the time had nothing about ordinary people doing real things and showing true feelings. Thrillers and sex stories were the public's unstable diet and it isn't unnatural they preferred real people to the contemporary pasteboard caricatures.

Even in its title its unknown author had captured an inherent trait in the character of the people. *The Good Companions*, by Yorkshire journalist J. B. Priestley, told about the people he understood, about the county he loved, and in the only way he knew. His journalist training had given him an ease of style which he could adapt to any subject.

For this novel he had carefully martialled his ideas and written them up with as much ease as he wrote his political leaders for the daily newspapers.

Then he decided to get to an even wider public and his excellent dramatisation of the *Good Companions* showed him to be something more than a novelist or

journalist.

This success showed him clearly that to achieve his ambitions the theatre offered more scope, more reality, more feeling and more emotional permanency.

In a study of Priestley's plays it is not difficult to discover his ambitions. He saw himself as a schoolmaster with many thousand pupils but, unlike his illustrious predecessors Shaw and Galsworthy, he was uncertain as to what he should teach. He did not have any specialist subject, though he had the vast general knowledge of the journalist. It was from this store that he extracted his ideas, sugared them considerably, and placed them before his eager scholars.

He chose philosophy as an opening lesson, showing how a chance remark made at life's *Dangerous Corner* may lead to success or disaster. The fact that this original though defeatist theme was not revealed through real characters nor developed in convincing terms prevented this play ever being more than "commercial." However, he did show his knowledge of his contemporary bourgeois audience by making all the characters' skeletons come from the sex cupboard. Unreal though this was it helped considerably to make "*Dangerous Corner*" a commercial success.

After this he wrote several plays with little outstanding merit, except that they provided him with the experience he needed—*The Roundabout*—the family story of *Laburnum Grove*—*Duet in Floodlight*—and his comedy of Big Business *Cornelius*. These plays were the best of the group that formed the holiday period at the Priestley University and it was after this interim that he resumed his instruction.

His knowledge of Einstein perhaps obtained from novelist Wells or air-

craft designer Dunne he was eager to display so he wrote *Time and the Conways*, and *I've Been Here Before*.

After having seen these plays the theatre student may well have asked "When IS Priestley going to write something for the theatre worthy of his talents as a journalist-dramatist?"

Our question was to remain unanswered for some years yet. Indeed, he had more ideas he wished to expound and he was still more interested in THEM than in how his characters adapted them to their own environment.

Not having achieved anything to approach his theatrical and commercial success of *The Good Companions*, he decided to put his next idea in the environment of his own Yorkshire.

His satire of bourgeois morality in the narrow lives of petty local government officials was much more to the liking of his audiences. *When we are Married*, though it lacked the originality of some of his previous plays, was enjoyed far more by the people. They preferred the real characters to the personification of philosophical and psychological theories.

From satire he returned to psycho-philosophy to reveal the journey from Life to Death. *Johnson Over Jordan*, despite its ignominious commercial failure, marked a high spot in the progress of Priestley's dramatic technique. His use of mime, masque and music showed him to be well capable of rising above journalism into the realms of play-writing.

This failure in the commercial theatre caused him to seek fame in a wider field, the Radio. Again he thought of his schoolroom, his students now numbering millions, and he gave them his ideas flavoured with the purple patches which his

literary knowledge knew would make them the more palatable. This time his Mass Education was far more successful. His purpose was clear. He was teaching people, not to reveal his own knowledge, but to help them to be better able to shape their own destiny. If his success needed to be proved, the B.B.C. and their stifling censorship provided all the evidence that was needed.

This rift gave him his next idea and *Good-night Children* showed a wholesale condemnation of Bureaucratic Dictatorship symbolised in his "English Broadcasting Company."

Though *Good-night Children* contributed nothing to dramatic literature, it showed what was wrong with Priestley's plays. It showed why he had never risen above commercial success and why he had never proved a vital force in the progressive theatre.

Good-night Children was an idea. A negative idea "Something is wrong I must tell people." So his play became a lecture telling what was wrong but offering no improvement.

Here was the result of ten years dramatic writing.

At the age of 49 was it too much to expect him to correct the error of his ways?

After seeing his latest play *They Came to a City*, there is no doubt that Priestley has taken the lesson very much to heart.

In this play the purpose, technique, and character drawing has rarely been equalled by contemporary dramatists.

The reactions of a group of people to a real Socialist city provides interest and humour. The aristocrats and capitalists hate it, as indeed they may. The middle-class can't make up their mind, whilst the proletariat realise that here is the city of their dreams. Here the new Priestley reveals himself. Instead of permitting those who like the city to stay there, he selects the two who like it most, a sailor and a waitress, to return to the life they have come from so that they can tell people what will be the reward, once privilege, ignorance, disillusionment, and apathy are replaced by equality of opportunity, knowledge, conviction and vitality. So though these two find it difficult to leave such happiness, they realise that only by fighting unrelentlessly to demolish everything that stands in the way of progress can such a city be reached.

At last the man with ideas has become the man with an ideal. An ideal he can shout from the house tops and an ideal which has been proved practical and successful wherever it has been wholeheartedly applied.

It remains to be seen whether Priestley explores the straight roads to the city or whether he comes off the road altogether at another dangerous corner.

Music in Wartime

by Eve Kisch

"In less than three years, a new world of sound has been disclosed to millions of untutored ears; CEMA still receives the call for more."

MUSIC, ALONG WITH THE OTHER amenities of civilised life, might well be supposed to languish in wartime; yet experience only proves the contrary. The traveller Negley Farson wrote of Leningrad in the nineteen-twenties: "This subsidising of the ballet, the opera, the famous art theatre, singers, actors, painters—in cities that were starving and where three families often slept in one room—was not frippery.

It was *not* done to impress the outside world—as so many fool foreign observers seemed to think. It was an act of *morale*, the act of a man who just doesn't let himself go to pieces because he has fallen on hard times!

But I would go further. Music, most transcendental of the arts, has a definite power to calm the human soul in times of turmoil, above all in that supreme turmoil which is war. Call it escapism if you like; but the present general urge to listen to Beethoven symphonies is very different from that ordinary ostrich mentality which sets night-clubs and music-halls booming all over a war-time world. Rather it is as if the ordinary person finds some kind of spiritual anchorage in witnessing a drama that bears no relation to the

spatial world, but is played out between characters existing only in the dimensions of time and tune. And surely this explains the present comparative unpopularity of that old-time favourite, the prima donna. Singers can only express themselves in words, and words inevitably have some bearing on life in the world we know only too well. Pianists on the other hand deal only in time and tune; and anyone who has arranged orchestral concerts in wartime England will tell you that a piano concerto—preferably by Beethoven—can hardly fail to "pack the house," particularly if the programme includes also a well-known symphony. None of your "light stuff," easily-digested little suites and "programme" overtures: the war-time British public wants, and is certainly getting, good solid helpings of Tchaikovsky, Dvorak, Rachmaninoff and—an easy winner—Beethoven. I remember, even midway through the European crisis of September 1938, when we expected war at any moment, it was at a Beethoven Promenade Concert that the queue outside Queen's Hall in London almost blotted out Broadcasting House across the way.

A year later, the actual outbreak of war brought a month or so of tension, when a Blitzkrieg on our chief cities seemed imminent. Musicians joined one or other of the Services, concerts were cancelled, schools evacuated, and every preparation was made for the total war which did not visit this country until nearly a year later. Meanwhile the arts came up to breathe once more. Broadcast music was conservative, and for the most part maintained the æsthetic level of a pep-talk; on the other hand, a well-known dance-band leader financed a national tour of one of our leading symphony orchestras, at a moment when its corporate existence seemed doomed. It was early in the war too, when Dame Myra Hess inaugurated the daily lunch-hour concerts in London's National Gallery: from then until now these have drawn excellent audiences, with programmes which never condescend.

Then, in December 1939, something was started which may prove to be the most outstanding national development of a generation—C.E. M.A. Incidentally it also anticipated the Lease-Lend principle; for it was American generosity, in the form of the Pilgrim Trust Fund, which first made it possible to form a Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts. "It began on the telephone," writes Dr. Tom Jones, the Secretary of the Trust. "Lord De La Warr, then President of the Board of Education, rang up the Secretary of the Pilgrim Trust to sound him about an 'idea' and a possible grant, nothing very much, £5,000 perhaps. A familiar experience. The 'idea' sounded promising on a first hearing, and it was arranged that the President of the Board should meet, without prejudice, the Chairman of the Trust, Lord Macmillan, then Minister of Information,

They met in the latter's room at the University of London at noon, on December 14th 1939. I was present.

Lord De La Warr was enthusiastic. He had Venetian visions of a post-war Lord Mayor's Show on the Thames in which the Board of Education led the Arts in triumph from Whitehall to Greenwich in magnificent barges and gorgeous gondolas; orchestras, madrigal singers, Shakespeare from the Old Vic., ballet from Sadler's Wells, shining canvases from the Royal Academy, folk-dancers from village greens—in fact, Merrie England. Lord Macmillan's grave judicial calm collapsed suddenly and completely. At the moment he was responsible for the national morale, and in the President's dream he saw employment for actors, singers and painters, and refreshment for the multitude of war-workers for the duration. Supply and Demand kissed. Would £25,000 be any use? The Secretary blushed and fell off his stool!"

This first generous gift, "for the encouragement in wartime of amateur music and drama, combined with the assistance of unemployed musicians and producers," was soon afterwards met by an equal grant from the British Treasury. £50,000 may seem a considerable sum, yet it was only a beginning. A small but indefatigable staff were lent offices in London by the Board of Education, with whom C.E.M.A. has worked throughout in close co-operation; and they were responsible for administering this money all over the country, wherever need was greatest. At first comparatively remote places were tackled: small towns and villages, newly-filled with factory-workers and evacuees who badly missed their city amenities, whether symphony concerts or fish-and-chips. Here was a chance for C.E.M.A.'s concert artists to encourage

exiles, in town-hall, village institute, factory canteen, church or school: many of them in the beginning worked for fees which only just met their expenses. To "spy out the land," six "C.E.M.A. Travellers" were appointed, on the inspiration of that great-hearted musician, the late Sir Walford Davies. He called them his "dynamos" and he sent them out to strike musical sparks from many a cheerless corner that least expected it. These six musicians were not merely to be performers: they had to be able to speak about every aspect of music to every kind of person, to sing themselves and get their audience singing, or to play with equal ease on the concert-platform and in the back-kitchen quartet.

Then came the Blitz of 1940-1941. The morning after one of London's fiercest raids, C.E.M.A. received more than fifty calls for concerts in air-raid shelters and rest-centres: the office was astonished that, of all things, music should be among the first demands of people who had perhaps lost everything. Night after night, our artists went in parties to battered Dockland, or down into the shelters of the Tube railway. I remember playing one night in Covent Garden underneath the Market, and then being led, through dark passages of which I had never dreamed, from one Tube station to another. We played and sang to crowds beside those railway-lines, some sitting up on their improvised bunks, others standing all along the platform: at first we played and sang from music, then we gave them their own favourite tunes "by request," and soon these shelterers were forgetting their plight and joining in. Another time I played at a rest-centre in a school in North-East London. It was during a heavy raid, and we wondered if the ceiling was coming down

during the show; but the audience's eyes never left the performers. If this was mere politeness, it was gallantry none the less. As we were leaving after the concert, thirty more homeless people were brought in.

In March 1941 three more Music Travellers were appointed, of whom I was one. The other six had, during this first year, been scouring the country from Land's End to John o'Groats, exhausting themselves and their modest travelling allowances in covering tremendous distances. Now that we were nine, one of us was allotted to each of the wartime Civil Defence Regions outside the London area, though even this reduced "beat" covered in one case as many as seven counties. I was allotted to the North-West, four counties whose population, I am told, equals that of two countries in Scandinavia. At the time, the only person I knew in the North-West Region was a landlady in Liverpool, whose house I accordingly made my base. Here I came in for some nasty raids in March, and a really spectacular one in May. We were able to do some good in one of the most battered areas of Merseyside, where an instrumental trio was sent to a rest-centre for a week, but was asked to stay a fortnight.

That spring I explored nearly the whole of my region by road, staying wherever I chanced to be at the end of the day, and making many delightful new friends in the course of work. I began to agree with Shakespeare that—

"The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils."

Contacts were most varied: a Director of Education, himself a skilled draughtsman and versifier, who had

started a Hotel Waiters' Class for unemployed youths; a poor man in an industrial town who had taught himself from a book how to make perfect violins; a warden of a very remote factory-hostel who was installing an up-to-date theatre on the premises. It was like a treasure-hunt: every contact had to lead to music in the end. Often it was hard to arrange concerts; either the Army had all the available halls, or there was no suitable piano; there were difficulties of transport and accommodation, and above all, in those days of strictly limited funds, we were almost completely dependent for our publicity on local good-will, and this, with the best of intentions, was often sadly inadequate.

Since then, nearly two years of intensive work have brought far quicker results than any of us had dared to hope. The British Treasury, quick to realise that demand for our services was fast exceeding the available supply, have now taken full financial responsibility for C.E.M.A., which nevertheless remains an entirely independent Council, with its Art, Drama and Music Directors, its administrative headquarters staff, its Music Travellers and—the latest development—Regional Officers, who ensure that increasing requests for the various services are quickly and efficiently met. Theatre companies of national reputation are now working for C.E.M.A. all over the country; companies varying from the full-sized Old Vic to small units capable of working in village halls on "one-night stands," often driving off through the night to their next port of call. In the same way the C.E.M.A. art exhibitions, whether of original paintings, reproductions or photographs, are adapted to local conditions of almost every kind. The "Living in Cities" photographic exhibition actually exists in prints of

two different sizes.

But I am straying from my subject—music. "C.E.M.A. Concerts," being easier to transport, are naturally more widespread than the play-productions or picture-shows. In fact, given a tolerable piano already on the premises—a considerable proviso, let me add—one musician alone can give pleasure to hundreds. C.E.M.A. Concerts accordingly range from a "one-man show" to a string orchestra; but the most popular combination seems to be a man singer, a woman singer, an instrumentalist and a pianist. Often, in places where good music is almost unknown, we find that an instrument is too much of a rarity at the beginning: pianists and singers come first in general appeal, then violinists, then 'cellists and wind-players. The joy lies in "building up" a public; following a vocal-piano recital by a violin, then maybe a cello or flute, finally perhaps a string quartet: but it is all-important that this "progress" should be directed by the audience's own taste, forcing the pace inevitably leads to reaction. Yet, more than once, in a small village or a mining-town, I have been astonished to find that the item on the programme which gave the greatest pleasure was a Bach aria with instrumental obligato, something perhaps which the artists had almost hesitated to risk. On these occasions one feels like embracing the audience, or cheering them for giving a perfect performance.

The hardest public to please is that of industrial towns, where the human ear seems to have become vitiated by noise, in particular the noise of inferior dance-music. Good dance-music can, I believe, provide a good grounding for musical taste: those subtle rhythms, accomplished orchestrations and virtuoso performances can indeed often give a lesson to the

"straight" musician. Unfortunately, in the industrial towns of which I speak, such dance-music is conspicuous by its rarity. But here, songs from the better-known operas have a wide appeal: more full-blooded and less naive than folksong, they make an excellent point of departure towards the less obvious kinds of music.

I could exhaust much space with accounts of individual C.E.M.A. concerts and their various incidents, whether touching or comical. I could enlarge upon performers' difficulties: dilapidated, out-of-tune pianos, carpeted and curtained platforms, ice-cold greenrooms, loquacious chairmen, overcrowded hotels and impossible transport. But even where "conditions" are worst, and that is saying something, world-famous artists, whom C.E.M.A. has been able to engage to play to a "shilling public" ignorant of celebrity-concerts, have found much more than a compensation in their audience's welcome. In fact, they ask to be sent back for more. As for the public's shillings, when local expenses have been met, they go back to C.E.M.A.'s concert fund, so that music-making progresses like a snowball, gaining in quantity and momentum.

Then there is the problem of "making your own music," far from easy in these overcrowded times, especially where working hours are determined not by daylight but by shift. It is impossible to force enthusiasm; yet a C.E.M.A. Travel-

ler was able to mark the fourth centenary of one of our greatest composers by no less than fifteen Byrd festivals in her region. In my own part of the country, two experimental half-day schools for amateur conductors drew attendances of 210 and 260; and steps towards string classes are being taken, the chief difficulty being the provision of instruments. In one industrial town I started a minute orchestral society fifteen months ago: now, fully manned in all sections, it is playing some of the easier symphonies and concertos, and rehearsing "Messiah" with the local choral society. The professional dance-band players are among its keenest members, and the drummer has actually purchased a trailer to transport his unwieldy instruments, "and everyone gets out of my way, because they look like land-mines."

Musical pioneering may be uphill work at first, but every minute spent on it is infinitely rewarded. In less than three years, a new world of sound has been disclosed to millions of untutored ears; and from every body of public opinion, whether educational, industrial, or just "the man in the street," C.E.M.A. receives the call for more. Although belts may have to be tightened it seems unlikely that the country will allow such a golden beginning to be cut short at the approach of peace: rather, we should look forward to a time when the international language of music will be every Englishman's birthright.

V. I. Nemirovich - Danchenko

HERBERT MARSHALL describes the life and work of the man who, with Stanislavsky, founded the Moscow Art Theatre.

ON THE 7TH OF AUGUST, 1938, K. S. Stanislavsky died. On the 25th of April, 1943, V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko died. Thus ends the partnership of two great artists; a partnership unique in the annals of theatrical art. For these two men, co-founders of the Moscow Art Theatre, had the supreme satisfaction of knowing that their theatre would not die with them; even more, they saw it grow and flourish as a mother of theatres, as a fountain head of inspiration for theatrical art and theatrical theory, not only in their own country, but throughout the world.

The Moscow Art Theatre, first opened in Moscow, on October 27th, 1898. What was it that caused this particular theatre to pass through all the crises of modern history and survive and eventually flourish? There are two reasons: (1) the fundamental aim of its two founders secreted within itself the seeds of progress, and, (2) the historical environment proved to be fertile background for their growth.

The happy concurrence of these two factors is the fundamental reason for the Moscow Art Theatre going from strength to strength despite wars and revolutions and the eventual death of its two co-creators.

Let us analyse these two factors;

(1) Stanislavsky in his book "My Life in Art" says, "The programme of our undertaking was revolutionary. We protested against the old style of acting, against the theatrical, against false pathos, against declamation and overacting. In our iconoclastic, revolutionary zeal for the rejuvenation of art we declared war on all convention in the theatre wherever manifested." The Art Theatre sprang into existence as a legitimate reaction against the stagnation and decadence which afflicted the Russian stage at that time.

To create such a theatre demanded on the one hand creative ability, artistic honesty and cultural striving; it required on the other hand, business-like organisational ability, highly developed critical faculties and a wide knowledge of the arts. To combine these widely varying qualities in one person is practically impossible; there has to be a division of labour. Many great theatre artists have failed because they did not have such a division of labour. The tragedy of Gordon Craig for example was that he did not find his Nemirovich-Danchenko. It was the great fortune of Stanislavsky that he did. He says in "My Life in Art" the following regarding his amateur "Society of Art and Literature," the predecessor of the Mos-

cow Art Theatre. "If, before, the indifference of the Moscow public drove the actors from the theatre and forced them to think of changing their careers and the necessity of saying final farewells to art, now, after success, there was created a counter trend toward the theatre. The growing popularity teased ambition, and ovations and success became indispensable. They wanted to become honest-to-goodness actors as soon as they could. All became spoiled and the simple amateur accidental performance in the little theatre with small houses and receipts did not satisfy. We needed our own theatre with daily and well-organised performances. The straightforward question of the quickest keeping of my promise, that is, of the creation of our theatre, became more and more pressing. Doubts of the possibility of realising my plan were heard oftener and sharper. Some of the actors were lured away by other managers. Here Fate helped me again, making me meet the man whom I had sought for a long time. I met Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko, who, like me, was poisoned by the same dream. It is strange, I had known him for a long time. He had long been a familiar figure in the theatre, a dramatist and a teacher of dramatic art, a stage director and a critic and an expert, and I, instead of going straight to him, looked for help where I could least hope to find it, among professional managers who knew only how to buy and sell art. The theatre which performs a cultural mission, demands of the persons engaged in it very much. To be the director of such an establishment one must be a talented expert in his own field, that is, understand art not only as a critic, but as an actor, a stage director, a producer, a literateur, an administrator. One

must know the theatre not only theoretically, but practically. One must know the construction of the stage, the architecture of the theatre itself, one must know the psychology of the crowd, understand the nature and the psychology of the actor, the conditions of his creative work and life; one must have a wide literary education, tact, sensitivity, breeding, restraint, mind, administrative abilities and much, much more. It is seldom that all these qualities are met with in one person. But they met in Vladimir Nemirovich Danchenko."

At their now famous meeting which lasted fifteen hours they hammered out the principals of their theatre and their collaboration. The general principals can be summarised as follows:—

The name of the theatre was to be *Khudozhestvenno Dostoupno Teatr*, which literally translated means "The-Artistic-Accessible-to-all-Theatre," in contrast to the then existing non-artistic, commercial, accessible only to the well-to-do theatre; and they formulated a deliberate policy of cheap seats for the poorer classes, and particularly for the students and the intellectuals.

Secondly, the criterion of a theatre's work and productions was to be its artistic value.

Thirdly, the creation of a genuine repertory theatre with the aim of giving young actors every opportunity for development.

As I write I am struck by the up-to-dateness of these demands in my own country. Take for instance the following conversation which passed between them at their famous meeting in 1897.

"Take actor A" we examined each other. "Do you consider him talented?"

"To a high degree."

"Will you take him into the troupe?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because he has adapted himself to his career, his talents to the demands of the public, his character to the caprices of the manager, and all of himself to theatrical cheapness. A man who is so poisoned cannot be cured."

"And what will you say about actress B?"

"She is a good actress, but not for us."

"Why?"

"She does not love art, but herself in art?"

"And actress C?"

"She won't do. She is incurably given to hokum."

"What about Actor D?"

"We must pay a great deal of attention to him."

"Why?"

"He had ideals for which he is fighting. He is not at peace with present conditions. He is a man of ideals."

"I am of the same opinion. Permit me to enter his name on the list of candidates."

This very conversation alone shows how serious they were in laying the foundations of their new theatre.

Next came the question of artistic direction. They both realised that however democratic a theatre is, in the final analysis the power of veto, the last word, must be in the hands of one man only. Realising the necessity of this single authority in a collective production they mutually decided that "The literary veto belongs to Nemirovich-Danchenko, the artistic veto to Stanislavsky." Subject to this however, the theatre was run on a democratic basis, and eventually the leading actors and actresses became co-operative shareholders in the concern. It will be

seen that these were new factors of a progressive nature in the organisational side of the Moscow Art Theatre.

On the artistic side there were several other such factors of great importance; the first was that the criterion was to be artistic value and not box-office or star values. This applied both to the choice of play, the acting, and the whole production. Some of these were formulated as aphorisms:—

"There are no small parts, there are only small actors."

"One must love art, and not one's self in art."

"To-day Hamlet, to-morrow a supernumerary, but even as a supernumerary you must become an artist."

"The poet, the actor, the artist, the tailor, the stage hand serve one goal, which is placed by the poet in the very basis of his play."

"All disobedience to the creative life of the theatre is a crime."

"Lateness, laziness, caprice, hysterics, bad character, ignorance of the role, the necessity of repeating anything twice are all equally harmful to our enterprise and must be rooted out."

In a word the star was to be the ensemble and not the actor, the producer, or designer.

Further, the eventual aim was a system of repertory whereby different productions alternated throughout a given week, thus preventing the dreadful monotony of an actor playing the same part day after day for months and, as sometimes happens in England, for years! Such runs do not assist in the creative development of the actor. They just petrify him into a type. Rehearsals were to be as long as necessary until the artistic director was satisfied that the production was as perfect as it could be. It is note-

worthy that the first production of Tchekov's play, "The Seagull," in one of the Imperial theatres of St. Petersburg, was put on with nine days' rehearsal, and in the case of some of the stars with only three days' rehearsal. It was a failure which almost killed Chekhov as a dramatist. He was saved by the Moscow Art Theatre. In our own West End three or four weeks' rehearsal is the average. Some of the best productions in the West End such as Michel St. Denis' "Three Sisters" took six weeks, but the result and effect was at once visible. The Moscow Art Theatre, however, takes many months and sometimes over a year to prepare and produce a play. The resultant quality speaks for itself.

It will be seen that all these progressive factors add up to quite a new quality in the conception and creation of a theatre. But to these we must add one more, which is more than any other the core of the Moscow Art Theatre's success and permanence. That is the so-called Stanislavsky "method" or "system" of work with actors.

Here we can only just touch upon certain fundamental concepts of this method, which have been outlined by Stanislavsky himself, first in his book "My Life in Art," and then in more detail in "An Actor Prepares," and in his recently published "Notebooks" not yet translated. Stanislavsky himself points out, "My system cannot be explained in an hour or in a day even. It must be systematically and practically studied for years. It does good only when it becomes the second nature of the actor, when he stops thinking of it consciously, when it begins to appear naturally as of itself."

In effect Stanislavsky's "method" was the first attempt at a scientific approach to the creative act in art.

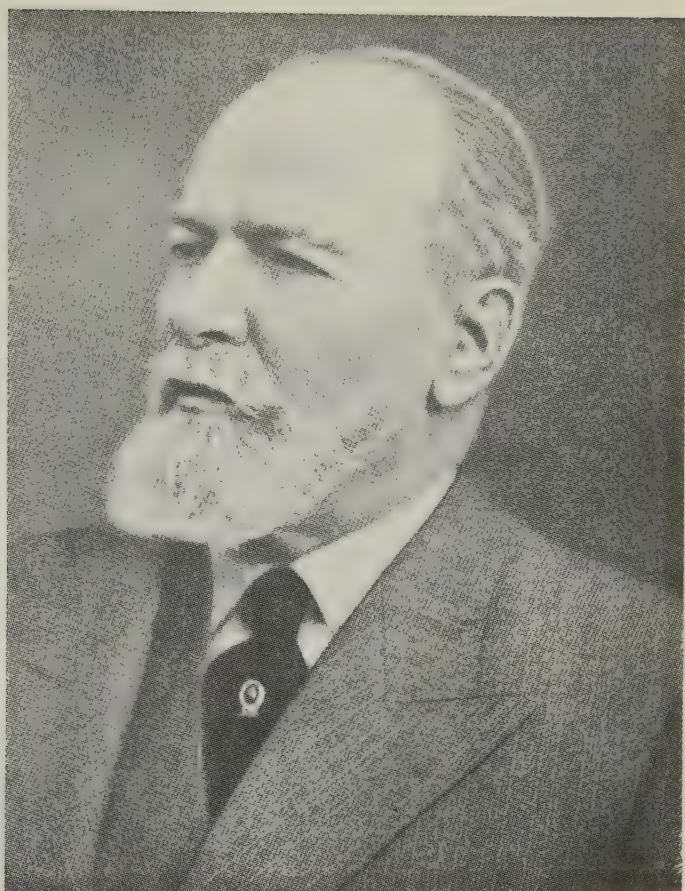
It attempted to systematise rule of thumb, empirical, methods hitherto used by actors throughout the ages in the creation of a character. Stanislavsky himself pointed out that he did not bring anything new into the actors art but only revealed and made conscious what had always been there in varying degrees and systematised it. Everyone knows the problem of "inspiration" in creative work. Hitherto inspiration had been considered either as a gift of the gods or as an uncontrollable and accidental element in artistic creation. Stanislavsky asked: How can one create inspiration? Just as Darwin revealed the laws of creative evolution in nature so Stanislavsky strove to find the laws of creative evolution in art. After years of patient self-experiment and study he formulated certain laws of acting, which he defined as "the creation of a human spirit." His method shows that inspiration can be induced indirectly as a result of conscious preparation, the creating of an artistic environment in which inspiration can come to life. To put it in philosophical terms, he discovered the varying quantities required which carried to a certain point create new quality, viz., inspiration. Through creative evolution to creative revolution.

Just as Stanislavsky insisted that the actor must disappear in the character, Nemirovich Danchenko insisted that the producer must disappear in the production.

It will be seen that the quantities of all these factors together produced a new quality which was The Moscow Art Theatre. These are the reasons why to-day the Moscow Art Theatre and its method goes from strength influencing the whole of the Soviet Theatre and beyond.

Now we come to the second vital

Vladimir Ivanovitch Nemirovich-Danchenko. Order-bearer and People's Artist of the U.S.S.R.



The house at Pushkino (near Stanislavsky's farm) where the Moscow Art Theatre rehearsed their first production.



"WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN" by Henrik Ibsen. 1900. Produced by V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko. A page from the Producer's notebook. Plan of Act I setting. With Production directions of mise-en-scene.



THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE. 1911. Produced by I. Y. Sudakov under the Art Direction of K. Stanislavsky. A scene from the play "THE DAYS OF THE TURBINS" by M. A. Bulgakov. Produced in London in a cut version entitled "The White Guard."

Handwritten notes in Russian, likely production directions or stage business, written in a cursive script. The text is dense and covers several lines of the page.

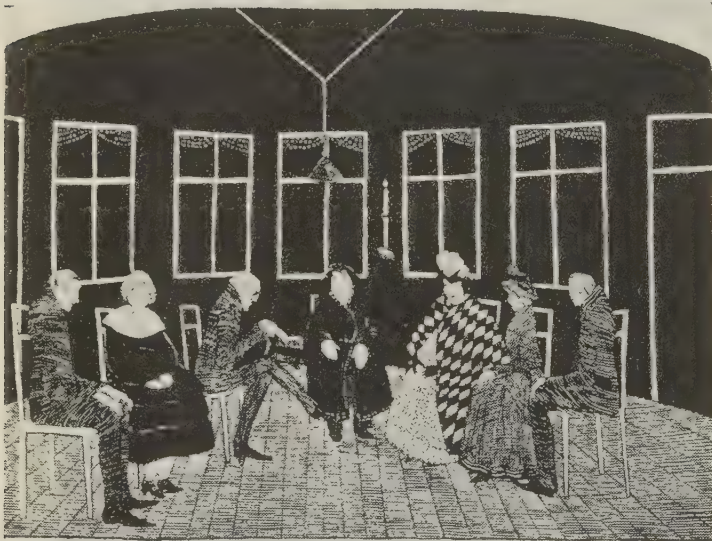
"THE LOWER DEPTHS" by Maxim Gorky. 1902. Act II. Produced by K. Stanislavsky. V. Nemirovich-Danchenko. Decor by V. Simov. Satin (laying a card) played by Stanislavsky.



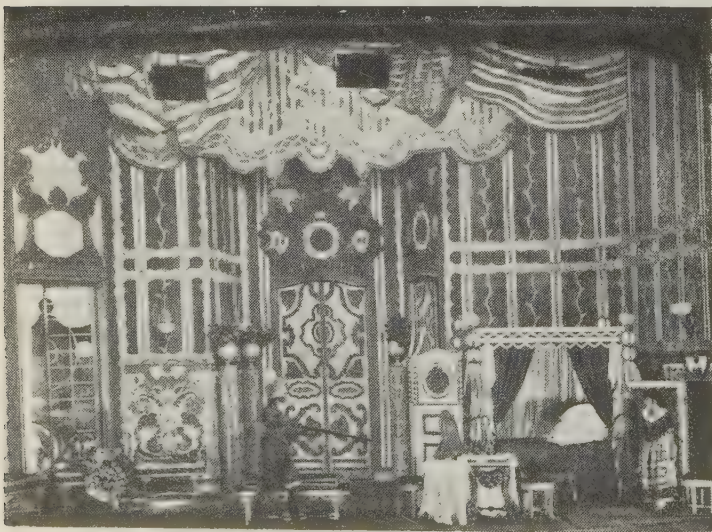




"ARMOURED TRAIN
14.69" by Vsevolod Ivanov.
Produced by I. Y. Sudakov
and N. N. Litovtsev under the
Artistic Direction of K.
Stanislavsky. 1927. Decor
by V. A. Simov.



"THE LIFE OF MAN" by
Leonid Andreyev. Produced
by K. S. Stanislavsky and
L. A. Sulerzhitsky. Decor by
V. E. Yegorov. 1897.



"THE MARRIAGE OF
FIGARO." Produced by K.
Stanislavsky. 1927. Decor by
A. Y. Golovin.

factor which enables the aims of its two co-founders to grow and flourish; that is the soil on which they fell, proved to be fertile; i.e., Revolutionary Russia. This was the happy concurrence of which I have already spoken, that the revolutionary aims and methods of two artists, in itself a reflection of the revolt of the creative classes (the proletariat and the intelligentsia) against the decadent semi-feudal system still carrying on an anachronistic existence, came to successful fruition with the successful revolution.

This explains why the progressive and critical character of Chekov, for example, could not be interpreted by the Imperial theatre, and the fact that Maxim Gorky's plays found their finest expression in the Moscow Art Theatre production. It is quite possible that if the great October Revolution had not taken place, the Moscow Art Theatre would have died, just as other theatres that started off with similar ideals such as Granville Barker's in England, or the Group Theatre in America.

A detailed study of the internal history of the theatre will show this clearly; it started off with revolutionary élan and produced revolutionary plays up to and including the period of the first 1905 revolution, but with its defeat and the reactionary period that set in, the theatre began to drift away from its realistic beginnings into the mysticism and symbolism of Leonid Andreyev, Maurice Maeterlink, and Dostoevsky—in fact it was at this that Maxim Gorky protested, causing a rift between himself and the theatre which continued until after the October Revolution. Nemirovich-Danchenko himself, in a speech on the fortieth anniversary of the Moscow Art Theatre said, "We well remember and realise that on the eve of the Great October Socialist Revolution

we were in a state of the worst confusion. This confusion was felt in our repertoire.

"Our art had begun to shrivel up. It had long not been so fiery and passionate as it had been when we started our theatre. It was at best warm. We began to lose faith in ourselves and in our art. Our striving to make our theatre accessible for all, our striving for a popular audience, was fettered by our economic situation. It was necessary to live, it was necessary to exist. Therefore, we had to turn to so-called bourgeois shareholders, dependence upon whom was painful to us. Our political life was colourless. We lost creative daring, without which art cannot advance.

"We all now realise perfectly well that if there had been no Great October Socialist Revolution, our art would have been lost and overgrown with moss. Therefore, in reply to the question to what and to whom we are obliged for our celebration to-day, I answer decisively and outright: we are obliged for this to the October Socialist Revolution and the genius of our revolutionary leaders."

"But at the time when the revolution did come, when the cherry orchard had been cut down, the Moscow Art Theatre did not at once fully realise the significance of the event, and its potentialities; in fact there was considerable distrust on both sides for some years. Stanislavsky with that innate honesty which is the very core of his method did not run round shouting new slogans or putting on any kind of agitational play, unless he understood and believed the slogan, and unless the revolutionary play was a work of art. So quite naturally as works of art are not produced overnight, the theatre had to wait patiently, producing classics until the real

revolutionary plays began to arrive. Nemirovich-Danchenko himself stated, "The garden has been burned away, the soil remains." And on the other hand, Lenin stated to Lunacharsky, "If there is a theatre out of the past which we must save and preserve at any cost, it is, of course, the Moscow Art Theatre."

Then on the tenth anniversary of the Revolution in 1927, the Art Theatre produced Vsevelod Ivanov's "Armoured Train." The new history of the Art Theatre dates from this performance. From this time the Art Theatre has emerged as the mother and teacher of Soviet theatres, having many children theatres growing to maturity along side of it, such as the Vakhtangov Theatre. The Stanislavsky Musical Theatre, etc. It has trained thousands of actors who have permeated many other theatrical collectives, bringing with them the high ideals, the strict discipline and the scientific methods of the Moscow Art Theatre. It has thus proved itself and its method in the iron crucible of revolution and socialist reconstruction. Its present and future tasks are summed up in the words of Nemirovich-Danchenko, "The Art Theatre remains basically clear, simple and vividly realist, just as it was before. The Revolution has deepened our understanding of art and made it bolder and stronger. The Moscow Art Theatre always recognised only that art which was imbued with great ideas. Now it adds to its repertoire by the inclusion of great socio-political ideas. It wishes to preserve the human quality of its performances while depriving them of all traces of cheap, sweetish sentimentality. It wants genuine socialist humanism filled with love for labour, the fatherland and mankind and hatred for its enemies."

Soviet Art and Industry

by Bryn Stanley

SINCE SOVIET RUSSIA ENTERED THE war, an added interest has been taken in her peacetime achievements and her superb war effort. Many articles have dealt with different aspects of her economic and cultural life.

In the belief that it can provide a clue to the question, "why is it that the Russian people are so united and so fiercely determined to maintain their system?" "Art and Industry*" has produced a special issue devoted to the role of art and the artist in the U.S.S.R. The Editor and Mr. Jack Chen—who prepared the issue—are to be congratulated; not only for the high quality of the text, but also for the exceedingly well chosen illustrations.

The changes which the October Revolution of 1917 brought about, in the sphere of art, were due to several causes. The progressive forces, whose aspirations had been frustrated so long, were now given the opportunity of realising their ideals. The welfare of artists of every nation, has, at all times, depended on the good will of their patrons, who, in the past, were made up of the wealthy nobility and merchant classes. With the coming of the October Revolution—the end of capitalism, and therefore of the wealthy and privileged—a new type

*"Art and Industry," Special Russian issue, May, 1943 (price 1s.).

of patron was created. The patrons of art were now the common people, represented by the Soviet Government. There was a great demand for posters and cartoons, as one of the most effective methods of mass propaganda. This brought forth the famous "Tass Windows"—a series of posters with poetic captions.

The "Left"—composed of groups holding varying opinions—proclaimed that art could be reduced to "scientific principles of form and 'effective construction.'" "Artists were engineers of form and colour." These extremely simple ideas may now appear to be old fashioned; but they had a desirable and partially lasting effect. They dispelled the notion of "art for art's sake" and brought the artist into the ranks of the engineers, builders and architects.

With the initiation of the Five Year Plans in 1928, started the industrial expansion, which has completely transformed the relationship of agriculture to industry in the U.S.S.R. The State demanded the rebuilding of innumerable towns and cities, with new factories, houses and municipal buildings. The industrial expansion gave the people more money to spend on their homes and personal requirements. They demanded better houses and flats and more attractive household furniture and fittings. This urgent demand for more of everything meant that some of the work was somewhat slipshod. These "infantile disorders" were overcome, however, by a higher standard being fixed by the Trade Unions and trusts and by the creation of model factories, which acted as "pace setters." Now there are several experimental institutes such as the Institute of Building, and standards are fixed by law.

In Mr. Chen's opinion it is in the planning and construction of great

social centres, such as the Palace of Soviets and the grand Crimean rest homes, that Soviet genius has revealed itself. This is due to the new outlook on the part of collaborating arts, and the establishment of suitable organisations to facilitate collaboration. Artists, sculptors, architects and engineers work as a team from the inception of the scheme; a notable example of this collaboration was in the construction of the Moscow Metro.

Along with every other section of the community, the Soviet artist is now primarily engaged upon war work of one kind or another—in propaganda, construction in the Urals and the Far East, and reconstruction of the liberated areas. The author quotes instances of the speed of the latter, for example, Stalingrad. "At Stalingrad, within five days of the mopping up of the last Germans, representatives of the artists and architects commission of reconstruction were on the spot with practical plans of rebuilding."

The task of the Soviet artist could not have been more clearly stated than in this extract from the section, "The Role of the Artist in the U.S.S.R." "His job as he sees it is the remodelling of men's 'psyche'—their feelings, emotions, ideas—along socialist lines, to make them better fitted for life in a socialist world where the motive of private gain has firstly been made absolutely subservient to the larger interests of social good and then is finally eliminated altogether in communist society, where the brotherhood of man is realised. The Soviet artist regards himself as the conscious instrument of socialist evolution and progress."

It follows from this that the Soviet artist will, so far as is practicable, combine beauty with "use-value"; for example, the Moscow Metro,

which, whilst primarily being built as a rapid means of transport, is nevertheless a thing of beauty. "One feels that within its halls one's shoes should shine, one's clothes should be tidy. Its deft efficiency and beauty orders one's mind."

Like all other workers in the U.S.S.R., the artists are organised in their Trade Unions, which regulate the hours of work, rates of wages, and so forth. In addition, all artists are members of the Union of Soviet Artists, which arranges conferences on policy, research and exhibitions and publishes works dealing with current problems. There is also the State Commission for Art Affairs, which advises the Government and administers the funds set aside for the upkeep of art schools, theatres, scholarships, etc.

In direct contrast to Nazi propaganda, which is based on wishful thinking, "the bigger the lie the more easily believed," Soviet propaganda is based on the truth. The propagandist explains to the general public the immediate tasks which face them, and suggests what must be done to achieve the desired result—he inter-

prets the facts which are known only to the expert.

There are several organizations engaged on propaganda work, ranging from the Government to the Trade Unions; each unit applying the general line to its own particular circumstances. Many artists are full-time employees of the various propaganda organisations, "but by far the greater proportion of this war-time art propaganda is done by voluntary or part-time artists." Some striking examples of war-factory and Tass Window posters are included in this section on "Soviet Propaganda Methods." There is also a highly interesting article by Eisenstein on "The Soviet Cinema."

These extracts from the Editorial will serve as a fitting conclusion to this short review. "A combination of faith, vision, and service to the community is vital to the health of the artist and the arts"; this combination has "been reborn in the Soviet Union, and we must see to it that whatever form it may take our post war organization shall also call them forth, for without them neither the nation nor the arts can flourish."

Monopoly Threat to Film Writers

by George H. Elwin, Gen. Sec. Assoc. Cine-Technicians

EVER SINCE THE END OF THE LAST war when America threatened and nearly succeeded in dominating the British film industry, there have been periodic attempts from a number of sources, both foreign and at home to obtain monopolistic control. I want to deal with one small but nevertheless important aspect of the current dangers in this connection, a proposal which if successful will monopolise screen plays and screenwriters by an organisation calling itself Scenario Institute, Ltd. The relative value of this proposal in relation to the total issue will not be minimised when it is realised that there is a large measure of support in film circles for the view that the screen play is the most fundamental and most important of all things in film production. But to fully understand all that this Scenario Institute involves it is necessary to consider briefly the background to the present position in which the British film industry finds itself and the controlling influences which have led to that position.

Film business is big business. It is spectacular business. No wonder, therefore, that big financial interests from time to time cast an envious eye in its direction. America long ago adapted the old adage of trade following the flag to "trade follows the film." It is not so long since American film interests tried to capture control of the British industry. They failed and the next aspirants on the production side were certain British insurance interests. Their fingers were burnt and their interests in British films gradually faded away. Now we are faced

with the most successful bid to date. Mr. J. Arthur Rank, miller, millionaire and Methodist is behind it. He already, states P. L. Mannoek in the *Daily Herald*, "caters for some seven million filmgoers weekly and controls £25,000,000 of capital." And this is probably a cautious understatement. Rank has branched out into all the three principal sections of the industry: production, distribution and exhibition. He controls major studios and film production companies, distributes their product through his own organisation and collects the shillings from the public through his own box offices in cinemas throughout the country. He is also interested in equipment companies which service and supply the cinemas. But that is not all. Cinemagoers are apparently to be moulded in the Rank pattern. The Odeon Cinemas (part of the Rank organisation) have sponsored a National Cinema Club for boys and girls who at their Saturday morning shows will, in addition to being provided with "healthy, full-blooded entertainment," will also have their minds improved and behaviour influenced without, in the words of Odeon Theatres, Ltd., "the children being aware that they have been the subjects of any such experiment." The cinema manager, every Saturday morning, will read the children the Club "Promise," described as a simple little pledge ending "I promise to try and make this great country of ours a better place to live in." All very fine and dandy, but I have very grave doubts as to whether the methods of the majority of the children's parents for

achieving this commendable end tally with those of a big financial magnate. The older patrons, too, have not been overlooked. "Sunday Thoughts," a series of short religious films, are to be shewn in the Odeon cinemas on alternate Sundays.

Naturally, this set-up is not without its political implications. Readers will remember Captain Margesson, the Chief Conservative Whip for many years, now gracefully retired to the House of Lords. On March 23rd of this year, as Rt. Hon. the Viscount Margesson, he joined the Board of General Cinema Finance Corporation, Ltd., controlling General Film Distributors, Ltd., Mr. Rank's principal distribution organisation. This company also controls two of the five newsreels, Gaumont-British News and Universal News. Could it be that Captain Margesson has not retired after all, but that the Conservative Central Office is digging itself in?

We now come to Scenario Institute Ltd., a modest little private company with £1,000 capital. But that is where the modesty ends. The venture is launched by Mr. F. del Guidice who is managing director of Two Cities Films, Ltd., one of the Rank film production companies. Mr. Rank is, of course, Chairman of Scenario Institute, Ltd., whose operations will, it is stated, probably be financed by loans from one or more of the directors. The Company has been formed "as a centre of culture," and "to acquire the film rights of novels, original stories, or screen plays," and to serve as a centre for screen-writing talent. In other words, it proposes to buy up film scripts and material and to sign up script-writers. The memorandum issued with the launching of the Institute naively denies it seeks to establish a monopoly but it is apparent that to be a success the Company

must obtain at the very least a near-monopoly in film rights, scenarios and scenarists. Otherwise it would fail in its self-declared objective of creating "a centre to which producers can look for the screen-writing talent in this country."

Mr. Rank, with his other interests, controls most of the British film studios and the production companies which work in them. The only substantial interests outside are three studios almost exclusively used for manufacturing their own product, Warner Brothers at Teddington, British National at Elstree, and Ealing Studios. Rank's influence even extends outside commercial production. He has recently been appointed a member of the Board of Management of the Crown Film Unit (controlled by the Ministry of Information) and which operates at Pinewood Studios, owned by Rank.

For whose benefit has Scenario Institute been formed? The three studios I have mentioned or the Rank interests. Together they comprise the principal interests requiring scripts and script-writers. And what chance have the 20 per cent. non-Rank production interests in competition with the 80 per cent. Rank interests if both want the same story or script or the same scriptwriter?

The Rank interests will be in a position to control what goes on the screen. It will largely control one of the most powerful weapons of propaganda. Through the Scenario Institute (if it succeeds) they will be able to control the stories and scenarios which will form the basis of feature film production. The Home Secretary in a recent speech drew attention to the undesirability of private monopolies and said that the relation between the State and industry will be a real post war issue. Mr. Morrison criticised major industries which run their own affairs in

their own way on a basis of effectual monopoly without real positive control by the State and without any true regard for the wide interests of the nation. He spoke of the post war issue of centrally organised industries, run not in the national interests, but running their own affairs in their own separate way on a basis of restriction, monopoly and safety first. These dangers are to-day as real in the film industry as in many of Britain's other major industries. The Government must face up to this issue.

There is another aspect which must not be overlooked. There would be a violent outcry if a single press magnate sought to buy up all the press and so make himself virtual news dictator. Isn't the screen to-day, long since past the time when it was purely a source of amusement and entertainment, almost as important as the press. It is in a strong position to influence public opinion, as the present-day use of the screen by the Government indicates. Should the screen, any more than the press, be allowed to be under a single control? Some years ago the Government took action when amalgamations in the banking industry raised the issue of the inadvisability of a monopolistic control of the financial machine. The process was stopped. It should, even more so, be halted in the film industry.

We know the public has been long-suffering in the type of entertainment offered to it in the cinema. But how would they view the position if the stamp of one man's mind was on all the films made? That is what Scenario Institute (if it succeeds) may lead to. The Institute would not buy stories it did not like. It would not have as members scenarists whose style of writing or views were anathema to its directors. And

to such writers 80 per cent. of the channels for selling their product would consequently be closed. The cinema, like the stage and the press, must be open to all who have a view to express. Otherwise its entertainment value will sag and its social value disappear.

The position in the film production industry itself will be equally alarming. If Scenario Institute succeeds it will have within its ranks all the best screen-writing talent and it will hold the rights of the most suitable film stories. Production interests outside the monopoly, if they survive, will be stifled. They will be deprived of the best screen-writers and the best stories. Or if they acquire the latter from the Institute they will be at inflated prices as the Institute will already have purchased them once and in a re-sell business acumen would be sadly lacking—a failing that cannot be laid at Rank's door—if some consideration was not added as the middleman's profit. But the more likely possibility, of course, is that such stories will not be for sale. Someone with closer connections with the Institute will have an eye on the story himself. In other words, the Institute is just one more reason to influence production interests to sell out to big-business. And according to film trade gossip offers are frequently made to the narrowing number of interests outside the Rank sphere.

But it is in considering the position of the employee that the Scenario Institute appears to be the most ruthless. No indication is given in the memorandum outlining the project that the Institute is to be controlled by its "members," that is the script-writers. On the contrary no script-writer is on the Board, which has the sole power to admit members. The Board, we are told, will draw up a list of members from

time to time. A writer who may have had a difference of opinion with a member of the Board, or one of the companies controlled by him, could be refused membership and his opportunities of employment would consequently be restricted. No reference is made to the scale of remuneration of members, engaged on writing scripts for the Institute, and there is no safeguard concerning trade union rates and conditions. Purchase prices of scripts may be inflated (as mentioned earlier) through film rights being sold at least twice (first to the Institute and then to the film producer) but nevertheless, it is specifically provided that the writer is to be denied any percentage of the additional money obtained. No wonder the film Trade Unions are vehemently opposing the proposal!

One further point. The Institute proposes to go further than the points concerning screenplays and scriptwriters already mentioned. It proposes to form an Academy Committee (comparable to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Hollywood responsible for technical research and awards for artistic achievements) and as a scheme for the future visualises the establishment of a school, university or academy. It hopes in this way to find new ways for film making to become more efficient and economic. While opposing the method, most of us would naturally welcome such an objective. It is surprising, therefore, that the British Film Producers Association, of which Mr. Rank is Chairman, has so far resisted all approaches by the unions in the industry for the establishment of joint committees for the purpose of increasing the efficiency of the industry. Any such proposals must be operated by the industry as a whole, jointly by the employers and the employees, not by any sectional

interest. The suggestion of a school, university or academy is equally commendable as a general principle. But not a school controlled by a private company whose Chairman dominates the industry served by the school. That sort of education has been abolished long since. The Board of Education (even with Mr. Rank's money, if he likes) with the support of the various trade associations, trade unions, and so on, should undertake such a job. Certainly not Scenario Institute, Ltd.

Those sections of the film industry still able to express an independent view are mobilising themselves against Scenario Institute, other Rank proposals (which I have not dealt with here), and of course the main issue of whether one person shall be permitted to obtain a monopoly control of the British film industry. Screen-writing interests, the Trade Unions, non-Rank sections of the industry and the Cinematograph Films Council (a Government committee representing both the trade and the public) are all anti-monopoly. American film interests, too, are lining up against Rank. It is commonly thought that the reason for M.G.M. bringing Korda back to England is to use him against the monopoly interests. Certainly he attacked Scenario Institute almost as soon as he landed in the country. In fighting this issue we must be careful we don't merely succeed in supplanting one danger by another. If monopoly is justified, the only justifiable monopoly can be a State monopoly, administered in the interests of the citizens comprising that State. That alternative apart, we must resist all attempts, wherever they come from, to place the British film industry under the control of a single individual operating for private profit and free from any form of Government control or supervision.

A Poet who never faltered

by O. F. Knudsen

I shout in the dark—oh, if only you heard !
There is only one thing to do:
Take up your arms while yet your hands are free !
Save your children ! For Europe burns !

RESISTANCE IN NORWAY TO THE Nazis has perhaps found its most adequate expression in the spiritual and intellectual spheres, through the valiant stand of great and influential bodies like the Supreme Court Justices, the teachers, and the Church. But this would have but little significance if it were not for the equally clear perception of political issues by all classes of Norwegians, and especially by the great mass of working people. To sharpen this perception was before the war the principal mission of Arnulf Overland, the Norwegian "Revolutionary Poet." This was in Norway the loudest and most persistent voice warning of and condemning the vile Nazi creed. He warned and condemned until the last.

Overland is typical of the kind of poet who arose on the impetus of the Russian revolution. He had his counterpart in all countries where poets began to link their own being with the people in general. These poets often earned the deprecations of critics for linking their art with practical issues, with parties and nations. Their critics were not only of one kind; they were often attacked for not being practical enough, for not being sufficiently imbued with

"party discipline," for being in effect "long-haired intellectuals." They were not reliable. Overland was to prove how mistaken both sets of critics were.

In the work of Overland we see a poet who developed gradually and unmistakably from the personal to the universal in humanity. He began writing around 1910 and his work was the work of youth, expressing youth's sentiments, but expressing also chagrin, frustration, impatience. The sense of being cheated of life, of wasting precious time was paramount. It was then that the Great War and the Russian Revolution widened his perspective. In "Bread and Wine" he engrossed himself with the war and the peace settlement. His vision was good, for he saw immediately that the new peace was bad, that the spirit of revenge would send a new wave of war over Europe before another generation had grown to maturity.

But in the new Russia lay hope. In 1923, Overland joined the Revolutionary Students' Organisation, "Towards Day." He became an undisguised propagandist, a writer, speechmaker, lecturer. The industrial working class in Norway was young—industry came late to Norway—and the workers were perhaps

the most radical in Europe outside Russia. Overland by his work helped the Left trend in Norwegian politics, helped to bring to power the Labour Government which has been in office for the last eight years.

But Overland was primarily a missionary of the "Revolution." "The Blue Mountain" expresses this to the full; he exhorts:

"I say to you who have slaved and bled,
To you no saviour has been born !

I say again to wench and slave,
Save yourselves !

They want to own you hand and foot,
Break off your chains !

They own your tools, your land,
your homes,
And you pay rent to all and one !

They say the land is ours and free,
Then take it ! For the Kingdom is yours ! "

But his work showed on the whole that political interest is not incompatible with good art. Simultaneously with his purely propagandist activity he developed deeply the "purer" poetry of more personal experience. But the identification of self with all humanity remains in his work; the strife, the pain, the hope of all men were also his. He began to write a human ritual which in its sheer humanity would replace religious writings as the basis of man's worship.

Overland did not forget the world of reality. Nearly everywhere capitalist democracy was weakening, and fascism rampant. Only in Scandinavia and a few other places did Social - Democratic governments appear to be making a success of democracy. Overland was one among the Left who did not forget

the persecution which flourished elsewhere on the Continent. The titles of his poems in his last collection of writing, "The Red Front," speak for themselves: "Spain 1937," "Guernica," "The Refugees." . . . And realising the urgency of his own message, he became a full-blown and open propagandist. His vast output of material for songs and recitations at popular working class meetings is indicative of his readiness to work on what some would call a "lower plane" in order to spur on the people and awaken them to political consciousness.

He appealed, implored, demanded that his people should recognise and combat the evil in Germany and elsewhere, which they were so inclined to ignore or discount. He wrote a poem in which, incidentally, he foresaw his own future fate—the concentration camp:

"You must not suffer lightly
The injustice beyond yourselves !
I cry with the last breath I can muster:
You have no right to forget !

Do not forgive them; they know
what they do !
They breathe on the embers of hate
and spite !
They joy in killing, delight at sorrow,
Take pleasure at seeing the world in flames !
They wish to drown us all in blood !
Don't you believe it ? Surely you know !

I shout in the dark—oh, if only you heard !
There is only one thing to do:
Take up arms while yet your hands are free !
Save your children ! For Europe burns ! "

This moving appeal—so inadequately interpreted here—was made in 1937. It was, of course, in vain.

Not until April, 1940, did Norway take up arms against Nazi Germany. And when that happened, Overland immediately put himself at the disposal of the Home Front. He became a "national" poet, but this did not involve any compromise with his convictions. For what is more universal than the struggle for freedom and against oppression!

"We had no sword for strife,
We put our faith in kindness,
In toil, respect for life,
Unconscious of our blindness. . . ."

Though some are fallen, and others
Must follow ere the end,
We've strength that will not fail;
We shall survive, my brothers. . . ."

Overland did not compromise, least of all with the fascists. He was taken away from his people, and lies incarcerated now in some concentration camp in Germany. Need it be added, however, that he is not forgotten, that he stands out as a martyr whose example lends strength to a fighting people? Amid the welter of poems which the struggle in Norway during the occupation has inspired is also one dedicated "To a Norwegian Poet." The poem remembers that Overland was never deaf to the suffering of the tormented, that he understood. One day he was proved right, and the people also understood. And when "they" came, he stood by all he had said. They took him away to a concentration camp somewhere in Germany, to share the fate of those many of his predecessors of all nations whom he had once championed. His gaolers hoped to see him cowed, afraid, but:

"Deep in our hearts and souls
You grow, strong as never before,
Where no stranger can jintrude,
There you will live, e'en though you
die!"

Capitalism, Writing, and the War

by James Miller

LIKE ALL CULTURE, LITERATURE reflects the society which forms its background. The history of English literature since the Imperialist War of 1914-18 is the mirror of a deeper history, and helps to tell the story of an important period in the evolution of our society.

In Britain, poetry and "fine" writing have been, generally, the monopolies of the upper and middle classes. This was of course more exclusively true in the early stages of capitalist development, when bourgeois culture, like bourgeois economics, was virile and in the ascendant. But even in its period of decline capitalist culture still remains a dominant force in our lives.

Britain's culture, then, has been, even in the turbulent years following the Great War mainly a reflection of the bourgeois mind. As a result of the ever-quickenning decay of an outworn civilisation and the terrible war it had produced (which did for a time furnish writers like Rupert Brooke with the temporary dynamism of jingo fervour), English literature in the 1920's was irresponsible, often obscure, "arty" and largely divorced from the mass of the people. No longer able to draw further life and dynamism from a perishing civilisation, and because writers were largely of bourgeois origin (the *rentier-litterateur* type)

and incapable of understanding the decay and stagnation around them, literature in this country became "puritanical," "aesthetic," "art for art's sake," and so on.

Inevitably (after a short period of negatively pacifist poems about the war by men like Wilfred Owen) writers became more and more divorced from the common people, until they were safely ensconced in their "ivory towers." Pessimistic and world-weary, like the poems of T. S. Eliot; introspective, sex-laden and containing embryonic fascist sentiments like the novels of D. H. Lawrence, the literature of the '20's painted a vivid if unwitting picture of the economic and social condition of capitalist society in decline.

In the late '20's, and particularly after the economic crisis of 1930, there crept into literature a renewed social consciousness. Writers, now *personally* aware of the insecurity of the society in which they found themselves, and at last conscious that fascism, now increasing its power in Europe, meant the end of even our impoverished culture if it were to triumph universally, began to take notice of the society in which they lived. They began to be curious about the Soviet Union, its immunity from the world slump and its ever-increasing prosperity. They began to take notice of a flower that could blossom in a world drenched in weeds.

A new "school" of writers then appeared (the Auden-Spender-Isherwood group) who began to write with much more consciousness of their world than the writers of the '20's had possessed. The work of nearly all this group showed some Marxist influence, but very few of this new "school" completely understood the basic social problems that formed the background to their writings. And because without excep-

tion—in the early '30's anyway—they were of middle and upper-middle class origin they reflected by no means accurately the activities and feelings of the common people.

As the power of fascism grew, and Hitler's sabre started to clank, the attitude of this new "school" became more and more violently anti-fascist, but in, as a rule, a vague, negative, and often irresponsible fashion. Consequently the more complex developments of the political and class-struggle in recent years has confused and "disillusioned" so many writers, thus cutting them off from a source of inspiration that grows fuller and richer and not less so.

The height of social consciousness in the writers of the '30's was reached during the Spanish Civil War. Here—apart from young men like John Cornford who, thoroughly equipped with the Marxist method, both took part in and understood the struggle of the Spanish people—English writers began to compose the swan-song of their "Left" attitude. Spender and Auden, for instance, began a half-retreat to the "ivory towers" with their "wider" more "humanitarian" attitude to society than "mere" political creeds could offer them.

In the late '30's we saw the appearance of a crop of extremely competent writers of really working-class origin whose works have been very much more knowledgeable of the everyday, struggling life of the masses. Few, however (that is among the better known names) seem to have a fundamental grasp of the problems they portrayed.

The Penguin series of "New Writing" read by a wide public, sheds some interesting light on contemporary literature. The reproduction of poems, essays, etc., that appeared during the Spanish War

and shortly after, indicates some poverty of first-rate writing at the present time.

Some young writers, hitherto unknown, and now serving in the Forces, thus making their social backgrounds obscure, are writing realistically of their war experiences, but few seem conscious of the tremendous revolution pregnant, indeed already being born, in the present conflict.

John Lehmann, the editor of this series (and not a Marxist) writes in Penguin New Writing No. 9: "... it will be a real disaster in a war like this which ... is melting down so much that seemed sure in our ways of living and thinking only a few years ago, if new writers are not to appear who are capable of adding something to the terrific effort of the mind and imagination needed to grasp and dominate what is happening to us. The surface is being described again and again by many clever journalists in newspapers and radio talks; but where are the new minds who can combine a vision of the deeper causes of our predicament with a vivid sense of immediate experience and will try to translate this into words?"

Writers born of the masses, in touch with the soul of the masses, without the inhibitions of "social distinction," but deeply conscious of the nature of our society, are the writers who can do just that. Who can describe realistically the struggle of the moment and interpret the deepest feelings and ultimate instincts of the masses in their war against fascism, the most evil product of capitalism in decay. A back-handed admission of this fact is given in the "New Writing" series of the frequent inclusion of work by Soviet writers like Sholokhov, Furi Olyesha and Nikolai Ognev.

The literature of Soviet Russia is, and has been neither "art for art's sake" nor a shallow pseudo-realistic effusion. It has been a vivid, beautiful, and truly realistic reflection of a society in the ascendant. The need for a new, vigorous, realistic and ultimately optimistic literature in this country is tied up with the necessity for explaining more widely the character of the war, the necessity for its vigorous prosecution and the ultimate replacement of fascist — capitalist — imperialism by a society where true culture may flourish at last.

Where are we drifting ?

by 'An Act'

IT IS DOUBTFUL WHETHER THE STANDARD of variety programmes has ever been so low as it is to-day. If one could attend twelve different Music Halls in any one week, one would hear at least eighty-five per cent. of the same gags and songs at each. Originality has left the Music Hall—even the originality of dressing or presenting an act. Material of all kinds is apparently everybody's property—though very occasionally managements protect their "top-liners" and penalise the "small-timers" whose gag has been purloined.

There is often talk about "vulgarity"—even in the stage papers, which seem to have forgotten great and talented stars like Marie Lloyd, Arthur Roberts, Malcolm Scott, George Robey, Little Tich and a hundred others, who did the name of the profession nothing but good, with their brilliance and individuality. So it is not "vulgarity" which has lowered the standard; it is possibly that very lack of "individuality." Before how many names can you put the word "typical" to-day? One used to be able to show the individuality by that word—a typical George Lashwood number, a typical Dan Leno routine, and so on.

The reason for the standstill in Variety (because it is neither retrogressive nor progressive) is briefly this:—

Artistes used to have to make their names in Variety—now they make their names and *then* go on the Halls. The public is seeing film and wireless stars, not true Variety performers. The smaller acts, instead of taking advantage of this and developing

themselves, simply ape the "names." To become a star at the Tivoli, the Pavilion and Oxford—to mention only three London Music Halls of past days—you had to have something new; you had to "bring 'em out of the bars" by your individuality and personality, and keep 'em out by your privately-owned material. Or, if you were a vocalist, by the richness and quality of your voice and showmanship. The microphone has, alas, not only made quality and power unnecessary, but forced singing and talking artistes of every kind to become static nonentities.

Well, what can be done about it? Oh, lots and lots—both by the managements and the artists themselves. Firstly, managements for their own sakes, should financially recognise individuality and talent. If they looked round at some of their second-spots and firsts-after-the-interval, they would find much to promote and encourage, and if the "big tour" bookers would go round the Halls, they would find a whole heap more. These might have to be vetted, produced, even re-dressed perhaps, but the result would be "stars." The managements could *make* drawing names at half the price they are paying the automatics. They might also find among the cheap and shabby revues, brilliantly successful artistes who have decided that it is more profitable to run these inferior and stereotyped entertainments than to appear as acts in a Variety bill, though as such they would be worth as much or more than they are earning as proprietors, for far less work and worry which the

necessity of establishing and touring their own tawdry background at present gives them.

The big managements should employ "spies" and "act-doctors" and writers. The report should first come from the local managers—"Tommy and Betty Snookes are good performers and popular with audiences here. However, this is their third visit and the material is unchanged. Their clothes and props are deplorable. Much could, in my opinion, be done with this act," etc., etc.

Of course, managements will not do this—not off their own bat, anyway. What about the artistes? To begin with, we must assume that the Variety Artistes' Federation has a "closed shop." No reform of any important nature could be completed without this. The registering of acts and material is a natural sequence. The encouragement of novel ideas—even by repayable financial assistance in the matter of dressing and properties—should be an important part of a specially-formed Committee's work. Writers and producers should be employed by both the artistes and the manage-

ments' federations, an advantage to both.

To-day, with no protection, when plagiarism is treated as a joke (how tired one is becoming of "I laughed so much, the pen fell out of my hand" by the way) it is impossible to improve the art of any but the dumb acts, who need so little improvement, one is glad to see. They, at least, are progressive. After the war, will you be able to blame the managements for importing all the foreign acts they can get, and engaging professionally all the Forces', and factories' amateur talent they can find, in order to give the public *something fresh*? There can be no harm ever in importing foreign acts, provided that they can compete favourably in entertainment value with the British, and unfavourably in cost to the managements. But why should they?

We are all servants of the public. Something must be done to make us good servants. We must try to think co-operatively and go forward with the rest in the cultural development of all arts, which, with the better and fairer education of the working classes will be demanded by our new masters.

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